

Making It Happen



Report from The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat

5

reach every student



"Our provincial educational journey is taking us in bold new directions to exciting destinations."

In the past couple of years, we have been encouraged by our Ministry to join an Ontario-wide campaign to improve the success of students. This has given us the inspiration for our collective 'Drive to 75' – our team effort to meet the government's goal that 75 per cent of 12-year-olds will reach the provincial standard in province-wide testing by 2008.

Journeys are always thrilling. There is the anticipation of reaching your destination, the unexpected joy in the surprises you find along the way, the challenge of finding your way and the pleasure in heading out with people you trust and enjoy.

Our journey is taking us further along the path of excellence. We are in good hands – our leadership provincially and locally is providing us with a dependable map to guide us along the way. Our drivers are excellent – the teachers, principals, administrators and support staff are able and alert, working hard to keep us safe and on track. Our passengers – the students in our care – are enthusiastic and eager.

It promises to be a very fascinating voyage!"

Lorne Keon

Director of Education
Renfrew County Catholic District
School Board & Chair of Council
of Ontario Directors of Education

An Expression of Gratitude

The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat thanks all those who work in the education sector for their commitment and assistance in improving achievement in Ontario schools.

Parents and community groups also deserve commendation for supporting students and schools in their efforts to improve publicly funded education in Ontario.

Sharing responsibility for student learning is certainly paying off as we raise the bar and close the achievement gap for all students.

Our students deserve no less.



Message from Avis E. Glaze

Almost 30 years ago, Ron Edmonds, the founder of the effective schools movement in North America, issued a challenge to educators. He said:

"We can, whenever and wherever we choose, teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to know to do that. Whether we do so or not will ultimately depend upon how we feel about the fact that we haven't done so thus far."

This statement is both an admonition and a challenge. In Ontario, we have accepted it as a challenge. We have made improvement in publicly funded education a top priority, beginning with improved student learning and achievement in literacy and numeracy. The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, created by the Ontario government, was charged with the responsibility of bringing about improvements in Ontario education.

In the fall of 2004, during the first few months of The Secretariat's existence, our primary focus was on the selection of a highly skilled and dedicated team of curriculum specialists and instructional leaders to take on the newly created role of Student Achievement Officer (SAO). We organized the SAOs to represent the geographic regions of the province and to work in teams to maximize the delivery of the nine strategies we developed to support the government's goal.

We also focused on building consensus for our mission, vision, values and beliefs. We stressed high expectations for performance and achievement within the context of a strong learning culture that paid attention to the human side of the enterprise. We worked collaboratively with school districts to set ambitious targets, support board-identified projects, build capacity and engender a sense of urgency to improve student achievement.

Starting in 2005, with increasing support from school boards, we adopted a more intentional way of implementing our strategies. We provided specific guidelines for target setting and school improvement planning, and we narrowed the focus for Local School Board Initiatives funding. We asked boards to zero in on building instructional effectiveness in literacy and numeracy, closing the achievement gap among different groups of students, improving reading and comprehension skills for junior students and strengthening leadership at all levels of the system.

During this phase, we also reinforced our commitment to research, evidence-based inquiry and data-informed decision making. Working collaboratively with other branches of the Ministry of Education and consulting with key system leaders, we began to explore a new tool, Statistical Neighbours, to help us track school improvement trends in a variety of contexts. To strengthen our communication with the field and to provide opportunities for capacity building, we launched a new e-journal, **Inspire: The Journal of Literacy and Numeracy for Ontario**, and the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat Webcast Series, which includes a video-on-demand feature, to provide professional development opportunities to participants regardless of where they live or work.

It is now time to sharpen our focus.

Starting in 2006, Secretariat resources – both human and financial – will be directed towards continuous improvement in the skill development of school leaders and classroom teachers. We are making extensive use of our research staff's analysis of student achievement results from the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) in order to provide interventions for low-performing boards and schools through the Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership (OFIP). We are becoming more explicit in working with boards and schools to utilize such research-based, high-yield strategies as literacy and numeracy blocks, effective use of literacy and numeracy leaders and differentiated instruction. And we have launched Schools on the Move: Lighthouse Program to promote inter-school and inter-board sharing of successful practices.

We are improving. We are building momentum. Let's stay the course!



The Secretariat will continue, with indefatigable zeal, to build upon the spirit of innovation that already exists in many schools and boards. We will redouble our efforts to create an even more supportive climate and highly skilled staff to increase capacity for goal achievement. We will seek new avenues for the engagement of all education stakeholders so that they participate fully in helping Ontario's students prepare for a future that requires higher levels of skills in literacy and numeracy.

For us, there is certainly a sense of urgency when children's life chances are at stake.

Avis E. Glaze
Chief Student
Achievement Officer
of Ontario and
CEO of The Literacy and
Numeracy Secretariat

Our Goal

The most exciting thing happening in education today is the reduced class sizes for primary grades. As a result, we are able to spend more time focusing on the basic elements of reading, writing and mathematics. I also see great excitement in mathematics. The students are engaged in discussions, playing games, using manipulatives to "see the math" and reading math-themed literature. They're saying, "Math is fun!"

Tanja Coghill

Teacher

Edgewater Park Public School
Lakehead District School Board

The Secretariat has demonstrated that data analysis must be the focus for discussion and improvement. We have been shown ways to collect data, to analyse it, and to go deeper into our repertoire of strategies to ask probing questions, to reinforce best practices of instruction, and to delve into each learner's profile, so that all students can achieve success.

Larry Murray

Principal

St. Aloysius School
Huron Perth Catholic District
School Board

In 2004 the government introduced an objective and transparent goal for the Ontario public school system, namely – by 2008, 75 per cent of Grade 6 students would meet the provincial standard (level 3) or higher on province-wide reading, writing and math assessments.

Our strategy is not about teaching to the test but about good teaching and learning. Test scores aren't the only indicator of success, but they're one important way we have to measure it. They help us know that our strategies are working.

The assessments of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) give us a snapshot of student progress to date. The latest round of results (2005–06) show the highest achievement since the start of the provincial assessments in what is the third year of sustained and continuous improvement in Grades 3 and 6. A trend of improvement is now firmly established.

Grade 6 Results 1998–99 to 2005–06

English-Language Schools

	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
Reading	48%	50%	55%	55%	56%	58%	63%	64%
Writing	48%	48%	53%	53%	54%	54%	59%	61%
Mathematics	46%	51%	54%	54%	53%	57%	60%	61%

Grade 6 Results 1998–99 to 2005–06

French-Language Schools

	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
Reading	59%	58%	54%	58%	58%	63%	67%	68%
Writing	58%	58%	57%	61%	63%	68%	70%	73%
Mathematics	55%	57%	60%	63%	66%	70%	74%	76%



In 2004, at its inception, The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat identified nine strategies to facilitate the implementation of the promising practices that already exist within schools and school boards to improve the reading, writing and mathematics skills of Ontario school children. These nine strategies are at the cornerstone of our work.

- ▶ **Strategy 1**
Help school districts set ambitious achievement targets which reflect high expectations for student learning and assist in developing improvement plans to operationalize the targets.
- ▶ **Strategy 2**
Establish and support teams of educators at the regional, board and school levels to drive continuous improvement in literacy and numeracy.
- ▶ **Strategy 3**
Help classroom teachers focus on success for all students and take advantage of smaller class sizes in the primary grades by providing training on best teaching practices and the use of assessment data to guide instruction.
- ▶ **Strategy 4**
Provide resources and professional learning to build the capacity of district and school leaders to implement best practices in literacy and numeracy instruction.
- ▶ **Strategy 5**
Allocate resources to support target setting and school and district planning to support continuous improvement while taking into account local conditions and avoiding the "one size fits all" solution.
- ▶ **Strategy 6**
Mobilize the system to provide equity in student outcome both by raising awareness and by providing professional development to target interventions for selected groups that continue to underperform, such as Aboriginal students, English language learners, students in special education programs and boys.
- ▶ **Strategy 7**
Embark on a process of community outreach and engagement aimed at student leaders, trustees and parents, to build support for the K-6 literacy and numeracy initiative.
- ▶ **Strategy 8**
Demonstrate a commitment to research and evidence-based inquiry and decision making and find effective ways to share this information with school districts and the public system at large.
- ▶ **Strategy 9**
Establish Ontario's presence on the national and international scene as a jurisdiction that is both learning from and contributing to the knowledge base about how to improve literacy and numeracy achievement.

The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat is staffed by some of Ontario's best and brightest curriculum specialists and instructional leaders, most recruited from provincial school districts and now serving as Student Achievement Officers. They play the role of critical friend in the Ontario system, setting the bar high for school district target setting while recognizing local needs and local conditions.

One Size Does Not Fit All

The highest percentage of adults without high school diplomas in Ontario exists within the jurisdiction of the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board. Educational support for children may not be strong in these homes. Our early EQAO scores reflected that demographic. However, the early results strengthened our resolve that education can, should and does make a difference so that children are not caught in the same cycle. Targeted approaches, intense and specific teacher training and specialized staff have made a difference so that the EQAO results of our students will meet the high standard of other students who come from different circumstances."

Janet Wilkinson

Director of Education
Keewatin-Patricia District
School Board

"At York Catholic District School Board, we have provided unprecedented amounts of professional development focused on key instructional strategies that impact literacy and numeracy skill development. Teachers also report great benefits from direct resource supports provided within their own classrooms and increased opportunities to visit and learn from their peers in model classrooms."

Susan LaRosa

Director of Education
York Catholic District School
Board

There's nothing helpful to be gained by proposing a one-dimensional model of excellence or of improvement for a multidimensional world. Ontario's school system is just too large and too diverse for a one-size-fits-all approach. In order to support local innovation and problem solving, The Secretariat introduced the **Local School Board Initiatives**.

Building on the work that was already taking place, The Secretariat funded 170 initiatives in 2005 that further the goal of improved student achievement in literacy and numeracy. In 2006, The Secretariat, sharpening its focus, funded 80 different projects. In 2007 and beyond, with the introduction of the **Ontario-Focused Intervention Partnership (OFIP)**, the focus will become even more precise to zero-in on students and schools that need additional attention and resources.

Some of the **Local School Board Initiatives** are very comprehensive, impacting many thousands of children, whereas others are quite small, impacting a hundred or so children in pilot projects. Some address literacy and numeracy skills directly, whereas others are designed to improve conditions for learning, such as creating a more inclusive school environment. The initiatives represent a tremendous infusion of support – nearly \$34 million dollars – to build the capacity of school districts and schools to deliver the highest-quality public education. Collectively, they offer exciting opportunities to share lessons learned across the system.



One Size Does Not Fit All

The following **Local School Board Initiatives** supported by The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat in 2005 and 2006 are contributing to improved student achievement across the province:

- ▶ Conseil scolaire de district du Centre Sud-Ouest designed the **Welcoming New Canadians** project in partnership with community agencies, Immigration Canada, and the Conseil des écoles publiques d'Ottawa to develop classroom intervention and adaptation strategies to support the integration of immigrant children in the French-language school system.
 - ▶ The Northern Ontario Education Leaders (NOEL), a consortium of two universities, eight school boards and all nine district school authorities, launched **Improving Student Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy K-6**, impacting, potentially, thousands of Aboriginal children, boys, special needs students, and new Canadians in the north. This is an equity-of-outcome project, designed particularly to improve Aboriginal student success, by acquiring challenging but student-friendly resources, focusing on the development of oral language, enhancing support staff, improving the instructional effectiveness of teachers and carefully monitoring results.
 - ▶ The Renfrew County District School Board designed the **Avis Glaze Project** to improve the achievement of exceptional students in literacy and numeracy. A professional learning community model was developed for each of the seven project schools consisting of the principal, the special education resource teacher, primary and junior classroom teachers, and the early literacy intervention teacher. An Accommodations Strategy Bank has been developed for students in special education programs.
 - ▶ The Toronto District School Board launched **Early Years Numeracy, K-6**, a massive, multi-year project aimed at developing a strong instructional focus on mathematics over time by strengthening instructional leadership at school and district levels, creating professional learning teams that focus on building capacity and expertise in the area of mathematics, and engaging families in supporting their children's learning in math. Surveys, case studies and action research projects are being used to collect data on this project's impact.
 - ▶ The Toronto District School Board in collaboration with York University developed the **African Canadian Inclusive Curriculum** project, a three-phased initiative which includes research into raising the achievement levels of black students, a summer institute and remediation for students and the development of curriculum with an Afrocentric focus to enhance school engagement and achievement in literacy and numeracy.
- The Halton and Halton Catholic District School Boards are working with a coalition of community partners, OUR KIDS NETWORK, to launch the **Aldershot Literacy/Numeracy HUB Initiative** (the Hub), which, through a variety of programs, supports struggling and disengaged learners in challenged socioeconomic circumstances. The initiative represents homework clubs, primary literacy intervention, junior reading clubs, integrated technology and mentoring. The Hub also provides library resources and recreation subsidies.
- The Bruce Grey Catholic District School Board introduced **Assessment through Design**, a series of "job-embedded" district-wide professional learning sessions designed to help classroom teachers understand the role of assessment in instructional design to improve the writing skills of students.

Some school boards have been ahead of the government's agenda to identify and intervene on behalf of schools needing extra support. In 2003 the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board launched **Project Reach**, a program that made huge gains for under-achieving students in a very short period of time. **Performance-Plus** in the York Region District School Board is another example of a district frontrunner. It was started in reaction to students' poor performance on province-wide tests in York Region, but grew rapidly into a model for student success involving community participation, parent involvement, teacher innovation and strong school leadership. Like Project Reach, Performance-Plus supports children in overcoming disadvantages traditionally associated with lower socioeconomic status, language barriers, and family transience and instability.

Working in Partnership

"Our student achievement scores have shown a significant increase over the last three years. Through our vision for continuous improvement in literacy and numeracy, board and school teams support and sustain our Networked Catholic Learning Communities. Our teachers have flourished with the excellent professional development that has been provided by The Secretariat. We have worked closely with the province in establishing meaningful and achievable targets for improvement."

Larry Langan

Director of Education
Huron Perth Catholic District
School Board

"The Secretariat has provided our school with motivation and resources to support improved student achievement, and to foster the growth of our professional learning communities. The Secretariat's focus on research-based, data-driven instruction, and education for all, has been a catalyst for enhancing the learning experiences of our students. We are looking forward to sustaining this momentum during the coming school year."

Brent McIntyre

Principal
Beachburg Public School
Renfrew County District School
Board

The Secretariat was formed to work in partnership with schools and school districts and other educational and community organizations to build a new environment of inclusion and collaboration in Ontario education. It was not created to pose a single solution to the complex challenge of improving student achievement, but to work with others to build the rich infrastructure of support that is needed for all children in all communities to achieve academic success.

Building and sustaining partnerships, alliances and networks is the heart and soul of The Secretariat's work. Working with school districts and school leaders, teacher federations, faculties of education and universities, community groups and parent organizations, The Secretariat has brought the experience, expertise and ideas of education's many stakeholders to the table, with very positive results. Some of this exciting work is profiled below.



Working in Partnership

Through school and community partnerships ... more one-on-one support for students

- ▶ **Tutors in the Classroom** is a Secretariat-school district partnership built on the premise that all students can reach high academic standards if they are given time, support and instruction that focuses on their academic needs. During the 2005–06 school year, 1775 college and university students were trained and hired as tutors for students in 54 school boards. As a result of this program's popularity, effectiveness and feedback from classroom teachers, parents and school principals, The Secretariat is increasing the funding for Tutors in the Classroom for the coming school year.
- ▶ **The Trent Tutoring Partnership**, in which Trent University's School of Education and Professional Learning and three district school boards trained over 200 teacher education candidates to be volunteer tutors for struggling students in the Peterborough-Muskoka region, is another initiative. Five hundred students, the majority of them boys, have benefited from face-to-face and computer-assisted instruction. The tutors create individualized and strategic instruction for children reading below grade expectation in Grades 2 and 3. In just four months, many children gained more than half a year in their reading ability – increasing their reading levels at a rate not ordinarily achieved.
- ▶ **Literacy Links** is a community outreach initiative developed by Frontier College, the Ontario Teachers' Federation and The Secretariat to support the literacy development of children, K–6, in underserved communities across the province. Support from The Secretariat has made it possible for Frontier College to support 30 community-owned reading circles and train, to date, 500 volunteer literacy tutors to support children in their learning. To date, over 1300 children have benefited from participating in reading circles and one-on-one tutoring.
- ▶ The **Welcome to Kindergarten** program, which is being implemented in a number of locations across Canada, was piloted in Ontario by the Learning Partnership. The program provides parents and other caregivers with the resources and experiences they need to immerse young children in literacy experiences before starting school. The program provides training workshops for principals, Kindergarten teachers and community partners to build school-community connections. The Secretariat has partnered with the Learning Partnership to pilot a unique implementation model in North Bay that focuses on families in challenged circumstances. To date, 1500 families with preschool children have been involved in the North Bay pilot.
- ▶ The Secretariat also partnered with the Lieutenant Governor's literacy initiative, **Summer of Hope**, a network of 36 summer camps across Northern Ontario for Aboriginal children struggling with a range of academic and other issues. The camps, which build a love of literacy through storytelling and music in a camp setting, have also had a dramatic impact on building self-esteem and confidence among Aboriginal youth.

The tutoring program is a win-win situation. The children and their tutors develop strong relationships that energize tutors through the tangible difference that they are making for each child. The trusting relationship and focused instruction support children and enable them to take the kinds of risks necessary to improve their reading abilities.

Deborah Bernill
Researcher and Director
Trent University School of
Education & Professional
Learning

Working in Partnership

"The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat supported our Literacy Collaborative, a rich professional dialogue that has extended and strengthened our focus and influence on student achievement. Secretariat funding for our 'intensive support' schools also enabled us to improve differentiated instruction throughout the board and share promising practices with others throughout the Barrie district."

Bill Hogarth
Director of Education
York Region District School Board

Through professional learning partnerships ... improved instructional effectiveness

- ▶ **The Learning Institutes for Kindergarten Teachers**, held in regions throughout the province in the summer (with a follow-up session to take place in the fall), gave 600 JK/SK teachers an opportunity to come together to develop shared expertise in child development, literacy, numeracy, learning centres, authentic assessment and reflective practice. Following the release of the newly revised Kindergarten curriculum, this Secretariat-Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) partnership was designed to enhance expertise in setting up effective learning environments for young children – and to open as widely as possible the window of opportunity for literacy development (before age 6).
- ▶ The Secretariat also partnered with the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA) to run **Summer Literacy and Numeracy Institutes** for 600 teachers in five regions of the province. A key focus of the OECTA workshops was "differentiated instruction" – one of the strategies identified by Secretariat researchers for maximizing the benefits of smaller class sizes. Differentiated instruction recognizes that students differ in their readiness, interests and learning styles and so benefit most when teachers adjust instruction to their needs.
- ▶ **Leading Student Achievement**, a Secretariat partnership with Ontario's three principal associations – Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO), the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO) and the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC) – is an instructional leadership program that focuses on building professional learning communities in schools and across districts. The intent is to offer school leaders in 18 pilot boards a pathway to mobilize schools to improve the literacy and numeracy achievement of students in Kindergarten to Grade 6 and to document successful strategies that can be shared and implemented across the province. Over 700 principals and 18 senior administrators have participated in training sessions, material development projects, school and district learning teams, research planning and visits for shared learning. The partnership has expanded to include 982 principals in 33 boards.



Through research partnerships ... basing everything we do on evidence

- ▶ **What Works?** is a research-into-practice series produced by a partnership between the Ontario Deans of Education Association (ODE) and The Secretariat. The series, being launched this fall, will consist of 17 research synopses from different faculties of education across the province on topics of practical relevance to teachers, principals and others concerned with student improvement at the elementary level. The synopses will raise a question, indicate what the research tells us and identify implications for classroom practice.
- ▶ **Improving Student Achievement in Schools in Challenging Circumstances** is a Secretariat research partnership with OISE/University of Toronto, the York Region District School Board and the Toronto District School Board. The research team has identified 20 schools in challenged circumstances that show evidence of improved student achievement and is analysing them carefully to see what makes them work. A key outcome of the study will be rich descriptions of the leadership practices that make these schools successful as well as professional development modules on the key factors that make a difference.
- ▶ **Multiple Literacies Through Diversity, K-6**, is another research project in which The Secretariat is partnered with two universities (Ottawa and OISE/University of Toronto). This project aims to identify and then build a database of teaching and evaluation practices that support the success of ethnocultural minority children in elementary classrooms. The researchers will use case studies, interviews, focus groups and action research projects to develop a deep understanding of what it would take to implement these best practices across the Ontario system.
- ▶ The **Supporting School Improvement** project was undertaken to identify and analyse the factors that contribute to student improvement in mathematics at all achievement levels. This project, a partnership of The Secretariat, York University and two school boards (Greater Essex and Simcoe Muskoka Catholic), is based on the proposition that in order to develop strategies to help all students succeed we must first understand the relationship between school practices and patterns of improvement. In-depth research of schools in each board identified the following as keys to success: analysing student data, identifying areas of concern, setting goals, developing initiatives and focusing on professional development.
- ▶ The **Oral Literacy** research project conducted by The Secretariat and the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board examined factors contributing to substantial improvement in students' literacy skills, particularly those of Aboriginal students. Between 2003-04 and 2004-05, Kindergarten students' literacy skills improved by an average of 79 per cent. A key factor contributing to this dramatic improvement was the board's combination of approaches to oral language as not just the language of social interaction, but also as the language of learning/thinking and literacy development. The board's strong sense of moral purpose when it comes to equity and student development has led to the infusion, in classrooms, of culturally relevant practices in curriculum and instruction.

The provincial goal for Ontario school children focuses on foundational skills of reading, writing and mathematics which are critical to a child's education. Children – and schools – are much more than the focus on the three R's, but we must start here.

The Ministry of Education, with leadership from The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, will also begin to address, starting in 2006, a broader range of goals for children related to citizenship and ethical behaviour. The Character Development Initiative, being launched at a fall symposium, is informed by research which shows that citizenship and character education lead to improvements in reading and overall achievement scores, decreased student referrals to administrators, improvements in attendance and punctuality and decreased suspensions and expulsions.

Research-Based, Data-Driven

"The stars are aligning. Effective instruction improves student learning. Provincial expert panel reports have provided educators ready access to research-based teaching strategies. The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat provides consistent support to school boards to enable them to fulfill their mandate. If not now, when?"

"There has never been a better time to capitalize on the opportunity for education to change the lives of children. Educational research is clear. Discussions about what we need to do are no longer necessary. We need to focus on how to implement what we already know."

Mary Anne Alton
Director of Education
Bluewater District School Board

"At Rivière Castor, we have undertaken several initiatives so that our students stand out and our teachers become excellent instructional leaders. With our school being part of the remedial program, we have decided to build on what we are good at, and to change aspects of things we could improve."

André Larouche
Principal
Rivière Castor Public Elementary School
Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario

The Secretariat's commitment to fostering inquiry and identifying effective practices is based on the conviction that education policy shouldn't be a political football – it should be determined by data about where we are now and by evidence of what works to raise student achievement at the classroom, school and provincial levels.

Our research strategy involves deriving lessons from Ontario's education system and then reporting these findings back to Ontario educators. Doing the research is just as important as finding innovative ways to share lessons learned with those who will make it work in their practice.

Where we are now ...

The Secretariat, working with ministry partners and the EQAO, has developed a range of ways of analysing school performance to enable a comprehensive overview of student achievement results both across Ontario and for individual schools.

There is evidence of system-wide improvement in Ontario. In 2002–03, the overall provincial average for reading, writing and mathematics in Grades 3 and 6 was 54 per cent. Since that time and with the introduction of the literacy and numeracy strategy, the overall provincial average has improved each year to a current result of 64 per cent.

The government has set the goal of both "raising the bar" by reaching higher levels of student achievement and "closing the gap" by putting focused attention on ensuring equity of outcomes for lower-achieving students and schools. Progress is being made towards these goals.

For Grade 6, the government has set the goal of 75 per cent or more students achieving at or above the provincial standard. In 2002–03, 445 schools had 75 per cent or more students achieving at the provincial standard in reading. In 2005–06, the number of schools with 75 per cent or more achieving the provincial standard has doubled since 2002–03. Over 1700 schools improved their Grade 6 Reading scores this year from last year, many of them by five or more percentage points!

Over 2000 schools improved their Grade 3 reading scores this year from last year. And over 900 schools improved both their Grade 3 reading scores and their Grade 6 reading scores this year from last year.

Where we need to go ...

Through the identification of schools with less than optimal achievement over time, The Secretariat is working in partnership with boards and with schools to support continuous improvement. We are using increased precision in our data analysis to focus our actions. Through the **Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership (OFIP)**, we are working to provide targeted support to almost 400 schools in which less than half of the students are achieving at the provincial standard in reading.

We recognize that school performance and improvement are not simply about attainment measures. That is why we are developing a new tool, **Statistical Neighbours**, to enable dynamic analysis of school performance, context and challenges to improvement. Through this analysis, we can explore school performance data and contextual data, such as percentages of students living in low-income households, students whose language at home is different from the language of instruction in the schools, students in special needs programs, and a range of other socioeconomic, demographic and school characteristics information.

Through our research, we have identified schools that are showing substantial improvement in a wide range of contexts, including those that are succeeding in challenging circumstances. We know from this evidence that high achievement and improvement are being realized by schools in all contexts across Ontario.

Building on Ontario's own best practices ...

The Effective District-Wide Strategies to Raise Student Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy project was designed to identify school districts that had been moving in a positive direction for some time, tracking steady improvements in student achievement. These boards had implemented the following strategies:

- ▶ Lead with Purpose and Focus Direction
 - ▶ Student achievement is the top priority.
 - ▶ Professional learning and student learning are both supported as vital.
 - ▶ Education has a moral purpose to support not just students' academic achievement but also their broader learning and development.
- ▶ Design a Coherent Strategy, Co-ordinate Implementation and Review Outcomes
 - ▶ Create board and school improvement plans.
 - ▶ Prioritize resources to focus on student achievement.
 - ▶ Pay attention to roles and responsibilities of staff in supporting improved classroom practices.
 - ▶ Monitor and review progress, targets and outcomes achieved.
- ▶ Develop Precision in Knowledge, Skills and Daily Practices for Improving Learning
 - ▶ Extend professional learning, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy instruction, assessment for learning, classroom management and instructional leadership.
 - ▶ Pay attention to curriculum development, instruction and interventions to improve teaching and learning for all students, both system-wide and within schools.
 - ▶ Use data at a system and school level to ensure instruction is informed by student learning and progress.
- ▶ Share Responsibility through Building Partnerships
 - ▶ Build shared involvement with parents, communities and other organizations and agencies for supporting student learning.
 - ▶ Communicate frequently and with a sense of urgency to all stakeholders.

The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat Webcast Series

produced in cooperation with Curriculum Services Canada (CSC), highlights current expert thinking and provides examples of effective practice. The webcasts, available in English and French, are supported by viewer's guides and related articles. Viewers can access video on demand at www.curriculum.org

The Secretariat creates state-of-the-art training and professional learning institutes.

- ▶ Training on **differentiated instruction**, a powerful strategy for basing instruction on a child's skills, interests and learning style, was delivered to approximately 16 000 Grade 2 teachers, special education teachers and principals
- ▶ Training on **shared reading**, an instructional approach that teaches the skills and strategies of proficient readers to those who are still struggling, was delivered to 12 000 Grade 5 teachers and principals
- ▶ Training on **assessment for learning** was provided to principals and superintendents in the London, Ottawa and Barrie districts, with a focus on data management and analysis, taking precise action based on what the data reveals and designing and implementing a plan for improvement
- ▶ Professional learning on **coaching**, a strategy for giving support to classroom teachers, was provided to teams of teachers from every Ontario school board and school authority

Closing the Achievement Gap

A Teacher's Reflections on a Turnaround School

"Student behaviour is excellent in the Grade 2 classroom displayed, in a creative way, the development of a child's writing from September to the present... there were interactive activities... the special education resource teacher took the lowest-achieving four to five students on a daily basis for about 20 minutes to read with them or do other literacy activities."

Unna Lakshmanan
Toronto District School Board

Early literacy gains made by schools in the **Turnaround Teams** program give us a glimpse of what is possible over several years. The first percentage is the Grade 3 EQAO score in reading at the provincial standard (or higher) based on the year the school was selected to enter the program; the second percentage is based on the most recent round of EQAO results.

- ▶ Alexandra Community School in Owen Sound – from 31% to 78%
- ▶ Blossom Park in Ottawa – from 12% to 69%
- ▶ Our Lady of Fatima in North Bay – from 36% to 83%
- ▶ St. Jean Baptiste in Amherstberg – from 3% to 76%
- ▶ King George in Brantford – from 25% to 65%

School districts across the province are focused on improvement and are getting good results. EQAO scores are steadily rising. Yet some students and some schools are not sharing in the improved achievement that is underway. That is why we are sharpening our focus and developing more precision to help students and schools that are still struggling.

Focusing on Students

We have presently identified five groups of students who are not doing as well as they should and are in particular need of intervention and support: boys, students in special needs programs, Aboriginal and Black students and English language learners (ELL).

Provincial efforts to improve boys' literacy skills – wide dissemination of the teacher's guide **Me Read? No Way!**, support for 140 teams of teachers to conduct their own inquiry into best practices for boys' literacy, and funding (\$2.43 million) for schools to purchase books, magazines and software for boys – have already paid off. EQAO results in 2004–05 show that the gender gap is closing.

Among a range of initiatives that we have undertaken since the release of the government's expert panel report on special education **Education for All**, we have supported tutoring, purchased assistive technology and reading materials for children in special needs programs, and provided professional learning opportunities and new resources for teachers. We are working side by side with the Special Education branch of the Ministry which has funded The CODE Special Education Project (Council of Ontario Directors of Education). Our work together is just beginning to pay off with improved results.

Our work with Black and Aboriginal students and English language learners is based on research, some of it Ontario-led, which shows that race, class and culture inform specific academic needs. We need to acknowledge that students' different realities – their learning styles, cultural experiences, linguistic realities and more – are the keys to unlocking their potential. The Secretariat produced three webcasts last year to share the current research on effective practices that lead to improved achievement for each of these groups. We also helped to produce two more teacher's guides, one for supporting ELL, **Many Roots/Many Voices** and the other **Educating Black Learners** (in press).

Here are the strategies that we will be supporting more intensively in the months and years to come for all students. We know they will produce results:

- ▶ **High expectations** – Teachers must assume the brilliance of all children: don't teach them less, teach them more.
- ▶ **Mentorship** – A caring adult who takes a personal and professional interest has a great impact on student success.
- ▶ **Connection to community** – The involvement of parents and the greater community in the learning circle has a significant impact on student engagement.
- ▶ **Curricular relevance** – Students benefit from seeing their reality reflected in what they are learning; the content of the curriculum exemplifies the possibilities that are available to them.
- ▶ **Precise/effective teaching** – Student improvement is more likely to occur when we utilize strategies that have proven effective through evidence and research.
- ▶ **Use data to inform practice** – By collecting and reflecting on data, we are able to monitor progress, identify student needs and adjust programming.

Closing the Achievement Gap

Focusing on Schools

Secretariat researchers have identified a number of schools that are making student achievement gains in very challenging contexts – information which is, potentially, very inspiring for schools that are still struggling. We can confidently challenge the stereotypes about demographics and academic performance: all children in all communities can achieve success.

Intensive Intervention

Our new intensive intervention plan for low-performing schools, the **Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership (OFIP)**, being launched in 2006, incorporates the successful strategies of the ministry's Turnaround Teams program, which substantially improved student achievement in many Ontario schools in a relatively short period of time. In the first year of OFIP, we are working with almost 400 schools whose student achievement scores are either static or declining (less than 50 per cent of the student body reading at the provincial standard). The intervention begins with a diagnostic visit followed by help with a school improvement plan and target setting, an infusion of resources and professional learning support for staff. Our plan, in sync with the Turnaround strategies, requires that schools zero-in on what we refer to as "high yield" strategies for raising student achievement – strategies that require minimum investment but which research shows have a maximum impact on improvement, such as uninterrupted blocks of time for literacy and numeracy, using common assessment tools, creating a school improvement team and putting in place a strategy to improve instructional effectiveness. And of course, we will monitor progress and provide additional support as needed in a continuum-of-service model throughout the year.

Examples of Good Practice

We know that more and more districts and individual schools are looking outward for examples of good practice to encourage their own thinking and to galvanize change in their school communities. This is why we launched **Schools on the Move** as one of the ministry's Lighthouse Programs in 2006. People are looking for examples of improvement, not necessarily "best" schools. And so Schools on the Move 2006 were selected on the basis of demonstrating significant improvement year-over-year in EQAO scores. Among the 23 schools selected from every demographic region of Ontario are schools that began very low on province-wide testing but have shown substantial gains as well as schools that began high and have shown smaller gains but still are improving. Over the school year 2006–07, these schools will be reaching out to other schools to share their best ideas and help others use similar effective practices to raise student achievement.

Schools on the Move are exciting places to learn because the teachers and principals have read the research, know what works, and act on their professional know-how. They engage parents and communities, and together they succeed for children. And they are ready, willing and able to talk about what worked and why, and share that information with others. They will be at the heart of a province-wide network motivating and supporting learning in many schools.

Twenty-three schools (3 French-language and 20 English-language) were selected to participate in the first phase of **Schools on the Move**. These are the common practices that work across differences.

Overall...

- ▶ Staff collaboration
- ▶ Professional development, professional learning communities and a team approach
- ▶ Use of data to inform instruction
- ▶ Flexible groupings of students within classrooms
- ▶ Making connections between priorities in school improvement plans and classroom practice
- ▶ Supporting parental involvement

In teaching literacy ...

- ▶ Implementing a balanced literacy program
- ▶ Implementing literacy blocks
- ▶ Using such instructional strategies as guided reading, shared reading, independent reading and read-alouds

In teaching numeracy ...

- ▶ Acquiring and effectively utilizing resources to support numeracy, particularly manipulatives
- ▶ Connecting mathematics to students' lives

The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat provides high-quality professional development to administrators, school leaders and teachers through conferences, workshops, summer programs, webcasts and publications.

To access some of our most recent professional learning resources, go to:

► **The Secretariat Webcast Series** at
www.curriculum.org

► **Inspire: The Journal of Literacy and Numeracy for Ontario** at
www.inspirelearning.ca

The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat
Ministry of Education
900 Bay Street
10th Floor, Mowat Block
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy
Tel: 1-800-387-5514 or
416-325-2929 in Toronto or outside Ontario
Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD/TTY)
1-800-263-2892

Email: info@Ontario.ca

Cette publication est disponible en français.

 Printed on recycled paper.

ISBN 1-4249-2193-7 (print)

ISBN 1-4249-2194-5 (pdf)

© Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2006